

Common Folk Oral History Collection
Interview OR.0013.02 : Tape 2

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Location of Interview: Sogang, Panam [Tib. pa snam] County, Tibet Autonomous Region, China

Date of Interview: August 2000

Language of Interview: Tibetan

Interviewed by: Melvyn Goldstein and Ben Jiao

Name: Phundrül [Tib. phun sgrol]

Gender: Female

Age: ca. 70

Date of Birth: ca. 1930

Abstract

The subject was born in the village of Kepa during the old society to a family of shungyupa. In this interview, she continues her interview from OR.0013.01 and explains about being categorized as among the poor class during the Cultural Revolution. She describes the events that took place in her village during this time, including struggle sessions held against her elder brother. Additionally, she reflects on current and future conditions, her old age, and her future life.

Tape 2

A: Then I told them that you don't need to tell me to join the association.

Q: At that point, they had already categorized the classes like the rich farmers and the middle peasants and so on, right?

A: Yes.

Q: How did they categorize you?

A: I was in the poor class.

Q: At that time, which class was regarded as the good one, the rich, the middle, or the poor?

A: I heard that the rich and the middle classes were looked down upon. At that point, the poor classes were kind of proud for being the poor class and they were looking down on the other classes. But I never did like that and offended the other classes. I was just receiving what the State gave us and keeping quiet and doing some prayers [Tib. smon lam]. When they were saying that those people were enemies, I would regard them as enemies. But I didn't say anything to them because in the past, when I had to request something, they were not so reluctant to accept my request. So I neither treated them as enemies, nor made any friendly relations with them.

Q: Which was the biggest struggle session held in your place?

A: That was the struggle session held in the year of the "Three Great Educations," when they held a struggle session against our late lmi [elder brother] of Kepa.

Q: How did they start the struggle session, did they call all the people to the meeting?

A: They called the big meeting in the xiang. Then they called in the ngatsab and let them stand in the middle of the people. After that, the people who were holding the struggle session would stand up and they were holding very serious struggle sessions saying, "Didn't you make us suffer this and that and so on?" It was said that the State was not allowing people to beat them, but they were beating those people a great deal.

Q: How did they beat people?

A: They were beating them very much. My late elder brother was beaten so severely that his health became very poor. They were kicking, slapping, hitting his head with sticks and making them bow down. We heard that according to the policy of the State they

were not allowed to beat them, but they were not able to control the people. They also beat the two sons of Kaji Lama very severely so that they couldn't come out from their house.

Q: Did the people tell the truth when they were holding the struggle session, or they were just telling the things that they had made up?

A: When the person who was receiving the session was talking about "dotse," the people who were holding the struggle session were telling him, "Why are you still using the terms of the unit of money from the old society?" Actually he didn't know the terms of the unit of money in the present time. But just for using the old term they beat him up very severely. They were making them suffer very much, saying, "We are the poor class. Now the sun of the poor people is shining."

Q: When they were holding struggle session against your elder brother, what did you think?

A: They were making many false accusations against him. When they were holding the struggle session against my brother, I was holding my baby like this. When they were shouting the slogans, all the people were raising their right hands. But I raised my left hand. Therefore, they told me that I raised my left hand when shouting the slogans. Is there any difference between the left and the right hand? I was very agitated and I told them, "I am staying here abiding by the law and being honest, I am not a person who was acting recklessly. You guys are really audacious [Tib. skyag khral lang]! Then I went back home and I stayed home doing my weaving and I didn't attend the meeting. They were suspicious because us two were brother and sister.

Q: When you were weaving, didn't they come to find you?

A: No, they didn't. At that point, the father of Shodang Gyalpo [Tib. zho dang rgyal po] was the xiang zhang. We were in the same team. He told me that I should hold a struggle session against my brother, but I told him, "We two are brother and sister. You can kill him if you like. It doesn't matter. But I am not going to hold a struggle session against him." He was telling me to hold a struggle session against my brother without any reason. I told him, "You're just bullshitting me [Tib. khungs lung med pa]! Was my brother born from my mother's bottom, and was I born from my mother's rib? If you want to hold a struggle session against him, go ahead, I am not stopping you." They were just bullshitting. Actually what is the difference between the left and the right hand? Do I have to throw away my baby and raise my right hand?

The next day, when we were gathering in the team, they were talking about shouting slogans. I told the team meeting, "They were just bullying me. Actually what kind of special thing do you do by raising your right hand? I was holding the baby, but I went through the motions of shouting the slogan and raised my left hand. I don't have any knowledge, but I was doing my work honestly. He is my real elder brother, but he had never done anything against the constitution of the State. You should leave him like that. You should not hold struggle session against him like the other people holding struggle sessions."

Q: When you saw your elder brother suffering at the struggle session, did you feel sad?

A: I felt pity for him. It was really a pity! They were saying that he was the owner of the land. Actually, that was an inheritance from the former generations. But the former generations were lucky. They didn't suffer the struggle session. He had to suffer on behalf of all the former generations. That was like the proverb, "The dilapidated house built many years before, fell on the person who's life span has ended [Tib. lo mang bsags pa'i khang hrul/ tshe zad mgo la log song]."

Q: What did you say in the team? And what did they tell you?

A: I told the xiang zhang, "Usually, when I meet my elder brother on the way, the two of us never talk about the politics of the State and we never talk about hearing some kind of rumors. I am maintaining the status of my poor class and I neither treated him like an enemy nor made friendly relations with him."

Q: When your brother suffered the struggle session, did you get any chance to say something to comfort him after going home?

A: I didn't get any chance to comfort him. They made him suffer very much. They didn't give him any food during the whole day they held the struggle session against him. Therefore he was staggering from hunger. One day, Tratrug [Tib. khra phrug], the dütrang of the militia brought the girl Tsamjō with him, and he told me, "Now Wangdü [Tib. dbang 'dus] [my elder brother] is going to die. You should send some food to him through the girl Tsamjō." She was also related to my brother.

At that point, I told the dütrang, "Now you guys should give him some food because you took him to the struggle session. I am not going to give him food. If I give him food, somebody might criticize me." Later the dütrang said, "You should not say things like that." Then I sent some food to him through Tsamjō. My brother really suffered very seriously. I didn't know if the policy of the State would be like that, but we didn't know about the policy in detail. Later, it was said that they had removed the label of "enemy" [Tib. dgra bo] and after that I went to see my brother and he also came to see me. At that time, the policy became loose, so there was no problem.

My brother was very skilled in carpentry, masonry and tailoring, but later he couldn't work very much. At that point, I told him not to work too much. If you can just become self-reliant, that would be okay. Just eat your own food and keep quite, do not offend other people. When he was about to die, he called me and I was near his pillow when he passed away. He died from a stroke. I was the person who gave him water before he died [took care of him]. When he was labeled as an enemy. I would just tell him to confess his actions. It doesn't matter. There are many enemies. I never told him about hearing some sort of rumors.

Now, if I have just enough to manage my livelihood, I don't need anything from the government. They gave those rich households a lot of money surreptitiously, but they didn't give a single fen to the poor people like us. Those people in the xiang are not good. They didn't give us the things that the State gave us. Therefore I don't want to obey their orders.

I don't know those people [leaders] in the xiang, but you guys might know them because you were cadres. Among them, there was a woman who was saying, "Don't even think about getting the relief-aid [Tib. skyob gso] while we are alive." I was wondering if it was okay for them to say that while they were alive, [that] they are not going to give us the relief. I don't think that was okay. I was wondering whether the [State] had told them to do that. They were doing whatever they wished. You guys are working for the State, did you do like that?

Q: No, we didn't do that.

A: I don't think the cadres should be unfair because all of you were chosen from hundreds of people and selected from thousands of people. Some people after becoming the tsugdrang for 2-3 months, they would become arrogant [Tib. mjing pa sbom po]. So I don't want to obey their orders. All of us are the citizens of the PRC. If someone is honest, I will respect them. I have to respect the cadres like you when you told me to tell my views.

My daughter Phentog was quite poor but they didn't give her a single fen. Only some private people gave my daughter something. But they were giving [relief] to the rich people. That was like the proverb, "The dog house of Panam was low, but they were pressing it down hitting it with the hoe. The snow mountain Phari Jomo was high, but they were adding more snow on it" [Tib. pa snam khyi tshang dma' bar tog tse'i bcag bcag/ phag ri jo mo mtho bar kha ba'i yas sgron]. They were giving things to the rich households and they were drinking beer at night.

Q: When did you see the Chinese for the first time? Was it in 1959?

A: The Chinese came before the year 1959. There were just a few Chinese who came. At that time, it was said that there were some different footprints. Later we knew those were the footprints of the Chinese wearing cotton shoes. In the beginning, I was a little bit afraid of the Chinese.

Q: Why were you afraid at the beginning?

A: I was afraid and wondering what they were going to do. Before that there were some officials [Tib. dpon po] who would come and impose horse corvée taxes and beat people. Therefore, I was afraid the Chinese also might be like that. At that time, I didn't know the policy. Later, we came to know that they were like parents.

Q: Did the Chinese talk to you?

A: They were talking through an interpreter. Otherwise, we didn't understand what they were saying. They were making a lot of publicity [Tib. khyab bsgrags]. It was said that they would implement reform and they would take the land from the ngadag and give them to the people. I was thinking, "How could they give so many fields? That might not be true." Later, it was true. They did the reforms and I got land.

Q: When they were giving the things during the reforms, did they collect the things in the xiang and you went there to get them, or did you go to the household to get the things?

A: The xiang zhang and those people got many things that belonged to the ngadag in the past, like porcelain bowls, which were known to be very valuable. We just got some things which were given by the kungö. They [leaders] didn't give us anything.

Q: Did that yak that they gave you belong to the ngadag? Where did you go to get it?

A: That yak belonged to the lord [Tib. dpon po] himself. It was here. They gave that hornless yak to me. They didn't give things equally. There were two rukhag in this area. We were in the Second Rukhag. In the First Rukhag, Dagnyer and Chugong and other people were in it. The two rukhag were in the same village, but there was a big difference between the lands that belonged to the two rukhag. So the yield of two people in the First Rukhag and the yield of three people in the Second Rukhag, would be more or less the same, or sometimes the yield of the First Rukhag would be a little bit more.

Q: When you got the land and the yak at the time of the reforms, were you worried about the old society making a comeback? Did you think that those lands would belong to you forever?

A: I thought those things would belong to me forever. I thought, "How could the old society come back?"

Q: What was your reason for that?

A: The level of my understanding was low [Tib. chu tshad med pa]. I thought that the old society might not come back, but in case the old society came back, that would be a disaster and they would make us suffer very severely. Before that, we didn't have fields, so they might tell us that we took the lands by force and they might make us suffer severely. I was thinking, "May the Three Jewels Bless us. May the old society not come back." They [ngadag] had their own fields right up there. The people who didn't have fields in the past got the fields. That was really equality. If we had the land, we could work on it, and get the food. Even if our livelihood would not be elaborate, we could raise our children.

Nowadays, when we need to borrow something, we have the land as a means for repaying it. So it is easy to borrow grain and other things. But now I am afraid of having some quarrel with those people.

Q: Do you do religious practices?

A: I just recite some mantras [Tib. ma ni].

Q: Did you practice religion in the old society?

A: I didn't practice religion in the old society.

Q: Didn't you go for circumambulation?

A: No, I didn't. I was just working. Nowadays, I recite some mantras. I think, I have already stretched my leg to the sky burial and I will die soon. People are calling me Ani OR.0013, but that doesn't mean I was a nun. It means I was the aunt of the children.

Q: Some people say that old age would be a good chance to do some religious practice for the benefit in the future life. Do you think that is correct?

A: Now, I am old, so I think it would be beneficial if I could recite some mantras, though I don't know other religious practices. I have a rosary and I am reciting prayers. Otherwise, I don't have the means like a retirement pension to invite monks to do some rituals. It is like the proverb, "To offer hundred thousands [of] tormas, one needs a good sponsor [Tib. gtor ma 'bum ther gtong bar sbyin bdag bzang po dgos yong]."

Q: Can you call monks to do rituals once a year?

A: No, I can't. I have some suspicion thinking that I have reached this old age, but I can't perform rituals, so I might have some problem with my eyes. I hope that they will keep my body at home for one or two days after I die. I am telling them to keep my body for one or two days. I hope they will call a few nuns or monks.

Q: How do you think about the future life?

A: I was thinking that I didn't do any evil deeds in this life, so it might not be very bad in my future life. I couldn't do some virtuous deeds like giving charity because I didn't have the means for doing that. I've just kept an honest mind and I never had any kind of greedy thoughts. Therefore, I think it would not be very bad in my future life.

I was thinking, after my death if the children would offer a few butter lamps that might be beneficial. Even if they could not offer them, I think there would be no problem. Even if I have to take rebirth as an animal, I probably would not be reborn as a bad animal.

I only hope that I would die without much pain and the children would put some water in my mouth before I die. [That means to have somebody taking care of you before death.] Some people don't have anybody taking care of their bodies and some people had a lot of people doing elaborate rituals, but I am not sure whether that would help the deceased or not. I told my children just leave my body there for one or two days. If you could offer one or two butter lamps, that would be okay. Don't do any other things.

Q: Do you think that there is still something to be done before your death?

A: I am worried that people will bully these children after my death and they will face a shortage of food. My parents and brothers are dead. I am not afraid and I don't care if I die. Otherwise, I don't have anything to be done before my death. I am only worried about my children after my death. I bought a female dzo the year before last, but I was able to pay the money for it this year. The female dzo gave birth to a calf this year. When I bought the dzo, the former Party Secretary Lugsung, who was related to me, paid [loaned] the money for me [answer not finished].

Q: From where did you buy the Dzo [question not finished]?

A: He was not pursuing the money, but when I would meet him I would feel very embarrassed. I was praying for the success of that Party Secretary's work. I was hoping not to leave any debts for the children to pay. And I also prayed for the success of the State under which my children could lead an easy life. All of my brothers are dead, so I think it would be better to die rather than lead a disgraceful life [Tib. zhabs 'dren zhu mkhan]. I am praying that my children will not get insulted and bullied by other people.

Q: Do you think that this time of your life is the best period since you don't have to work and you can recite prayers?

A: Yes. I am old now, as I mentioned above, and the worst thing in this time is that the people are treating us unfairly. That is really too much. Because of this, I suffer a great loss. I can't take it any more. That is like the saying, "My mother sent me to do religious practice, but I was just jumping on the Kyikyí Naga meadow [Tib. a mas bu nga chos byed par btang yang/ bu nga skyid skyid na gar mchong rgyag gin bsdad]." The State gave them the things for relief aid, but they were giving those things to their friends."

Q: Do you think old age is good or bad?

A: If they don't give us the things that were given by the State equally, our livelihood will become worse. If they give us those things evenly, even if we could not lead a happy life, that would be a result of the karmic cause.

Q: Nowadays, do you have more thoughts of suffering or do you have more thoughts of happiness?

A: I was given land for six people, but the land of two people was damaged by the flood. However, if they would treat us fairly, there would be no problem. But last year, they imposed an order on us to sell grain to the government. I was forced to provide double the amount of grain to be sold to the government than the people whose fields were not damaged at all. That was really an in between policy [Tib. bar srid] that I could not tolerate.

Q: Do you think that the situation is getting better or it is getting worse?

A: It will probably not become worse. I think it will remain like this. As for the people, the main thing is their livelihood. They are just able to manage their livelihood.

